

Welcome to the Midcoast Senior College Course on the Philosophy of Art: What is Beauty? The question does not call for a definition. Instead, it is an invitation to explore the role of beauty in art from the perspective of philosophers who have developed theories and interpretations to explain its essence and significance.

I maintain artists are philosophers of perception. They can read the cultural climate of an era that may not be entirely evident to common knowledge. They create works of art that offer perspectives that raise questions and add spirit to our world. Notions of beauty are influenced by cultural norms and individual preferences, making the concept highly subjective and dynamic, and the energy generated from the creative tension in our culture evokes a range of responses from a quiet appreciation to loud criticism.

My purpose is to generate a discussion about why beauty matters. I know that art is for something salutatory. I also believe that the value of art and beauty goes beyond serving recognized purposes, such as aesthetic pleasure and the cultivation of higher taste. In conversation, this course offers an opportunity to engage with the experience of ugliness and to acknowledge the internal contradictions of other forms of value, such as politics, materialism, and finance, that have risen to a place of dominance in our culture.

I will share my thoughts and reflections from my study of philosophy and my experience of living in a world shaped in part by an appreciation of beauty. I look forward to your responses to those thoughts and your views of art. I will post course handouts on the course website before class meetings and provide a list of suggested books and articles before the class starts.

I warmly welcome you to join me in a lively discussion about what beauty is for.

Sincerely yours,

Christos J. Gianopoulos

